



Help people set small, achievable goals.

Sometimes in nutrition education and counseling, we have the opportunity to help people set goals for themselves.

Nutrition education does not always lend itself to this, but when it does there are good reasons to help people decide on a specific action plan rather than a vague one. Why?

Goals are motivating.

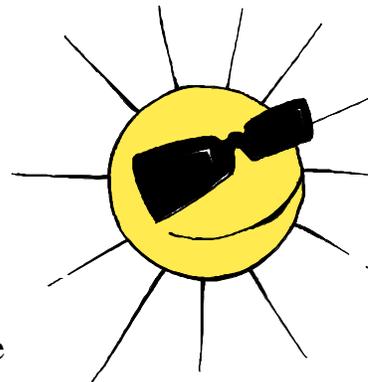
When we achieve goals, we feel great and are more open to achieving other goals. Achieving goals is good for our self-esteem and self-confidence. Parents with enhanced self-esteem and self-

confidence are probably going to be better parents and likely to look after their children's health and nutrition more carefully.

There are benefits for us, too, as nutrition educators. Using the power of goal-setting can help us be more effective without using any more energy than we

already do. It doesn't take more work to help people set goals, just a different approach.

There are some interesting dynamics that kick in when goal-setting is a regular part of your counseling session.



- **Clear goals that people can reach produce better results than general intentions which may have little or no effect.** Why does this happen?

It could be because a goal is clearly defined. If we take the time to clearly define something, we process it more and integrate it into how we think and act. We can grasp it better. It's not a vague intention. It's ours, we "own" it. We've come up with a way to integrate some good intention into our lives.

Vague intentions, on the other hand, are not yet processed or integrated. They are still "out there," intellectually and emotionally. We have not committed to doing anything about them.

Generally speaking, nothing in our behavior is going to change until we decide on some specific thing we're going to do. "I'll eat more healthfully during my pregnancy" is well-intentioned, but vague. "I'll eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day during my pregnancy" is clear and concrete.

- **Achieving goals helps people feel good about themselves.** They feel motivated to go on and achieve other goals.

It all goes back to that old saying that "Success breeds success." If a person is successful at one thing, the chances that they will go on and be successful at another thing are good. Small, challenging but "do-able" goals allow people to experience

There is a better chance people will actually try a new behavior if you help them anticipate obstacles and figure out how to deal with them in advance.

Write it Down!

Write specific "Things to do" down for people or encourage them to do it. It doesn't have to be fancy. If your nutrition handouts don't have space for this, use a note pad.

success in the near future (for instance, before their next clinic visit).

Helping people choose small, "do-able" things at which they are likely to be successful can also make them happier to see you at their next visit so they can tell you how they did.

- **Publicly committing to something often increases the likelihood that the goal will be accomplished.** *Saying* we'll do something is different for us than just thinking it to ourselves. When we hear ourselves say it, it takes on a reality that it didn't have before!

Lots of things go through our minds all the time, without becoming reality. But if we *say* we are actually going to do something, or try something, it becomes more real. It becomes more possible somehow, especially if somebody else helps us think through what is involved.

So keep in mind that small, achievable goals are often more effective than general good intentions.

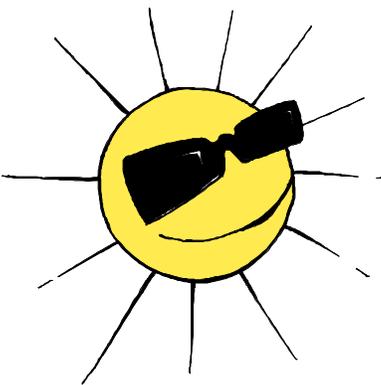
We can be more effective with the little bit of time we have with people if we can

help them develop a goal or sub-goal and help them break that goal down into specific things to do.

Here are some examples of concrete goals that may come out of nutrition education:

- "I will buy fruit instead of chips and cookies the next time I grocery shop."
- "I will walk 4 days a week for at least 15 minutes."
- "I will take him off the bottle by July 1st."
- "I will wait until she is 4 months old before I feed her cereal."
- "I won't give her anything to eat or drink (except maybe water) for an hour and a half before mealtime."
- "I'll make sure I don't give in when he whines for a snack after he has refused his supper. I'll wait until I give him a bedtime snack."

Is the goal something the participant is really comfortable with . . . OR has she agreed to do it to make you happy?

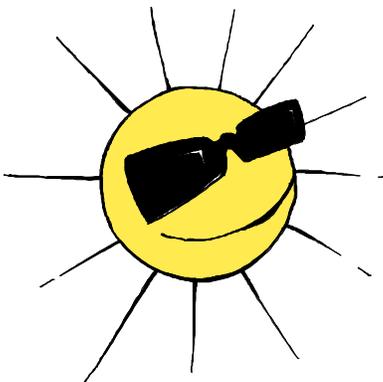


One way you can figure that out is to ask her to tell you, "On a scale of 1 to 10, what do you think your chances are of being able to do this, with 1 being "I can't do it" and 10 being "I can definitely do this."

If she scores herself as a 4, 5, or 6, you know she hasn't really bought into this goal. She doesn't really think she can do it. Maybe a different goal is more appropriate. Try to help her choose a goal she feels confident that she can do.

"Just trying" a new behavior can also be a good technique. In this case, the goal is just to TRY something.

Perhaps the pregnant teenager low in calcium is just going to TRY frozen yogurt. Perhaps she will just TRY strawberry flavoring in some very cold milk. She may not commit to doing it all the time, but she has at least set a small goal for herself that she may be willing to follow through on.



- *Figure out how important the goal is to the person.*
- *Ask the client how she thinks she can make the goal happen.*
- *Help the person figure out if the goal is too hard or too easy.*
- *Help people keep their goals small and "do-able."*
- *Keep track of what the participant says she'll do.*
- *Write the participant's goal down for her to take home.*

Why don't you "*just try*" goal setting?
It really could help you make more of
a difference in nutrition education!

ACTIVITIES to do before Discussion

Help people set small, achievable goals

Concentrate on goal-setting in your upcoming sessions. Here are some ways you can interact with people about goals.

1. **Help people define their goals.** Your goal might be to convince mom that her child needs to slow down on weight gain over the next 6 months . . . but is a slow-down in weight gain this mom's goal? How does she see it? What are her expectations? Does she expect him to actually lose weight? Or does she expect him to grow thinner over the next 2 or 3 years? Maybe she doesn't think his weight is a potential problem but does see it as a problem that this kid is asking for something to eat every 15 minutes.

There are lots of things that you can get sorted out as you help people develop goals. It can be a good focus for your conversation.

Between now and when you discuss this unit, write down 10 goals people have decided on in their sessions with you.

2. **Figure out how important the goal is to the person.** Ask, "How important to you is it for 'XYZ' to happen? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very important, how important is it for you? On that list of goals you are keeping, include people's rankings of the importance of their goals. See if this helps you and the participant gauge whether or not the goal is important enough to them to pursue.
3. **Help the person figure out if the goal is too hard or too easy.** Ask, "What do you think the chances are that you will be able to do this, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being a very good chance?" If they say a low number, help them reconsider the goal. Have they bitten off too big a chunk? Explain to them that you want them to be successful. Since their success at doing this is very important, narrow the goal to something they can be more confident that they can actually do.

If they say a "10," maybe the goal is too easy. Ideally there should be an element of challenge to the goal so that they will be proud of themselves for actually having done it. On your list of goals you have helped people set, keep track of how people rank their chances of doing what they plan to do.

4. **Help people keep their goals small and "do-able."** Does that postpartum woman want to lose all her extra weight in the next two weeks? Help her break that down into a manageable sub-goal so that she can experience success right away. Try telling people that you want them to think of things they can do that are challenging but not so hard that they can't do them before they come in next time. This also gives them the feeling that you will be asking them the next time, to see if they have met the goals they set.
5. **It's valuable to figure out how to keep track of what the participant says she'll do.** Is there a way to simplify nutrition education notes so that you can see at a glance what the participant's goals were the last time she was in clinic?

ACTIVITIES to do before Discussion

6. **Can you write down a goal for the participant?** Can you list any other specific things under that goal that you talked about in your session? People respond well to the reminder, as well as to the fact that you care enough to write this down for them. The goal can be written on a pamphlet. (How about using a Post-it note that she can stick on her WIC paperwork? She'll see it every time she uses a WIC check! Put her name at the top.)

It could benefit you to incorporate goal-setting into your nutrition education. Here is a list of reminders that you could copy, cut out, and put up over your desk:

- **Help people define their goals.**
- **Figure out how important the goal is to the person.**
- **Help the person figure out if the goal is too hard or too easy.**
- **Help people keep their goals small and "do-able."**
- **Keep track of what the participant says she'll do.**
- **Write the participant's goal down for her.**

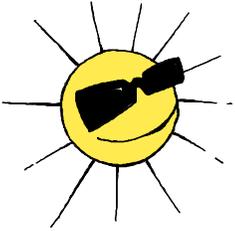


Complete the Activity Worksheet as you practice these activities.

Activity Worksheet
_Bright Ideas - Unit 8

Name _____

Date _____

**Help people set small, achievable goals**

List 6 goals WIC clients have decided on in their sessions with you while you have been using this unit: (indicate what the client told you about the chances they will be able to do this on a scale of 1 to 10)

Example: I will give him a small cup of milk with all three meals.

Ranking

7

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

How have clients reacted when you helped them break down bigger goals into small, "do-able" goals?

How do you help clients plan specific goals?

Typing the goal while the client is still in clinic can be helpful so you remember and the client knows you will ask at the next visit. How does this work for you? How do you remember to ask about the last goal at the next WIC appointment?

Discuss these ideas with your supervisor or in a staff discussion group. These activity pages and a discussion are to be done for completion of the module.